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AFRICAN

NATIONAL CONGRESS

Address by Gammde President Nausea F3. Mandate \$120)

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Cantewence. Prague. 26 May, 1992.

Mr Chairperson,

Your Excellency,

Distinguished Publishers and Proprietors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me 'to express my profound appreciation of the invitation extended to me by the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers to address this important assembly. I consider it a great honour that your organisation has asked me to share our views with you on this occasion. I recognise that this is an honour bestowed not on me personally, but on the movement which I have been associated with all of my adult life.

Vour conference takes place in the context of a rapidly changing world. During this century, which has witnessed upheavals and transformations of daunting proportions, the present decade will be recorded as a period of intense change, that has swept away institutions of long standing and is inaugurating a new age of

—  
The People Shall Govern!

WE KNOW FULL WELL THE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATIONS HAVE TO FUNCTION. SINCE OUR NATIONAL CONGRESS, THE LEVELS OF VIOLENCE HAVE ESCALATED DRAMATICALLY. MANY LOCAL LEADERS HAVE BEEN ASSASSINATED. IN MANY PARTS OF OUR COUNTRY IT HAS BECOME EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS TO MEET, SO THAT MUCH OF THE DISCUSSION WHICH WILL INFORM OUR DELIBERATIONS HERE, HAS TAKEN PLACE WHILE TOWNSHIPS WERE UNDER VICIOUS ATTACK. WE HAVE WITNESSED AN INTENSIFICATION OF ATTEMPTS TO DESTABILISE THE ANC, TO LIMIT OUR CAPACITY TO ORGANISE AND TO PROJECT OUR VISION. THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF STATE COVERT OPERATIONS WITH THEIR SINISTER AGENDAS, INCLUDES FORMAL ASSASSINATION PLANS, ARE REMINDERS OF THE ODDS AGAINST US. YET ALL OF OUR REGIONS HAVE HELD VERY SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL PREPARATORY CONFERENCES. THIS IN ITSELF IS A REMARKABLE VICTORY. WE ARE PROUD OF THE FACT THAT MOST OF OUR SUBMISSIONS TO THIS CONFERENCE WILL BE INFORMED BY OPINIONS AND

fuelling the violence that has decimated the African population of Natal and the Witwatersrand. Proof has now been provided. The investigations that have uncovered the sordid facts were conducted by small, independent publications who have pioneered a new tradition of investigative journalism which South Africa has sorely lacked for the last 30 years. That the criminals in high places responsible for these deeds might one day, soon, be brought to justice is a tribute to the alternative and independent weekly newspapers. The courage shown by these endeavours needs also to be recognised.

Founded at a time of severe repression, it was these publications that kept the flag of press freedom flying in the face of draconian press censorship. They offered a platform to the people and issues generally excluded from the mainstream print media. The established newspapers are beginning to follow the lead given by the alternatives in order to compete.

People on both sides of the political spectrum, particularly those in authority, are aware that the activities of the alternative media are under close scrutiny. As recently as the weekend of May 15th, the Minister of Law and Order in South Africa brought an injunction against the "Uleekly Mail" and "Die Urge Uleekblad" to prevent these two papers from bringing to light facts they had uncovered of police wrongdoing and a conspiracy to fuel violence.

The removal from South Africa's Statute books of the scores of laws, ordinances, regulations and administrative measures that abridge the rights of South African citizens to know the truth, and which repress the freedom of the media to publish, is essential for the creation of a climate of free political activity. We have insisted that this be effected as speedily as possible because these laws provide a convenient shield to conceal government misdeeds. They also inhibit the growth of a democratic culture that is beginning to find roots, and which needs careful nurturing.

The tradition that has emerged through this process must be safeguarded if we are to achieve democracy in South Africa. It is critical

we hope that the new political climate, created through the struggle of our people, in which the alternative media play an outstanding role, will afford the two sides of our media industry the opportunity to accept each other as partners, with a shared interest in defending freedom of the press now and in the new dispensation.

we stress that the mainstream media have an equal interest in ensuring the diversity of the South African press even in the teeth of the economic pressures that militate towards monopolies.

As the South African newspaper industry rejoins the world media community, it is important that meaningful steps are taken to reduce the imbalances in control and access to the media. In this regard it is necessary that the conglomerates who today bestride the South African media like colossi, find ways to disaggregate themselves so as to make room for other players.

Mr. Chairperson.

Despite the indecisive outcome of Codesa II, which stalled precisely because the National Party and Government refused to accept democratic principles, we have no doubt that democracy is the inevitable result of the negotiating process now underway.

Our country is making a troubled transition from racism and apartheid to democracy. Our path is beset with problems and at times the battalions of democracy are besieged by those of our discredited past. Those who want to cling to this past are determined to see us fail. It is they who are the agency for what has been projected to the international community as black on black violence; as inter-ethnic pogroms; or, at best, the expression of a primordial African intolerance of a diversity of political opinions.

There is now compelling evidence implicating elements of the State Security organs in the orchestration of these violent deeds. The shocking indifference of the majority of our white compatriots, which sadly finds reflection also in our mass circulation daily newspapers, to this heartless bloodletting is a cause for great concern. The De Klerk

The essence of the problem is not one of percentages or arithmetic. It is that the National Party is trying to hold on to power at all costs, introducing minority veto powers in a variety of ways that can only result in paralysis of decision making, strife and great instability. This intransigence fundamentally affects the very process of democratisation of the country.

The majority of disenfranchised South Africans can ill-afford to wait patiently while the privileged minority mull over the implications democracy will have for them. Those who delay the birth of democracy assume an awesome responsibility and should be aware of the risks their actions entail for the country as a whole. Our people cannot postpone their hunger. Neither can their freedom be postponed. Time is not on our side. South Africa needs democracy as much as its dry earth needs rain. The undoubted potential of our country and its people will never be realised without it. The HNC is fully aware that its own track record and commitment to justice has been subjected to question. We understand and welcome the concern expressed by our own, South African media, and that of the world.

I have often said that the media are a mirror through which we can see ourselves as others perceive us,warts and all. The African National Congress has nothing to fear from criticism. I can promise you, we shall not wilt under criticism or close examination. It is our considered view that criticism can only help us to grow, by calling attention to those of our actions and omissions which do not measure up to our people's expectations and the democratic values to which the FINE subscribes.

Many, including well-known international agencies, have expressed concern about allegations that the HNC has abused, maltreated and even tortured people it held in custody as agents in the employ of the apartheid government. We also want to get to the bottom of this matter. It is for that reason that the HNC has established its own Commission of Enquiry, composed of distinguished members of the bar, with impeccable records. We would have preferred that the

Party's faithful servants, the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Such a free press will temper the appetite of any government to amass power at the expense of the citizen. A free press will be the vigilant watchdog of the South African public against the temptation to abuse power. This is all the more reason why the press in South Africa, including in its ownership, should reflect the composition and varied viewpoints of all our people.

The African National Congress reiterates its commitment to the attainment of freedom of the press in South Africa as a democratic objective of intrinsic value.

The tide in the annals of all countries and peoples ebbs and flows. Even when it appears we have sustained reverses it would be foolish to despair. South Africa is experiencing the terrible birth pangs occasioned by a democracy struggling to be born. If we are to secure the life of the mother and her child, we dare not fall.

In closing, permit me to quote the words of that democratic journalist. Thomas Paine:

These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tis not easily conquered; Yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

Thank You for the opportunity to speak to you today.